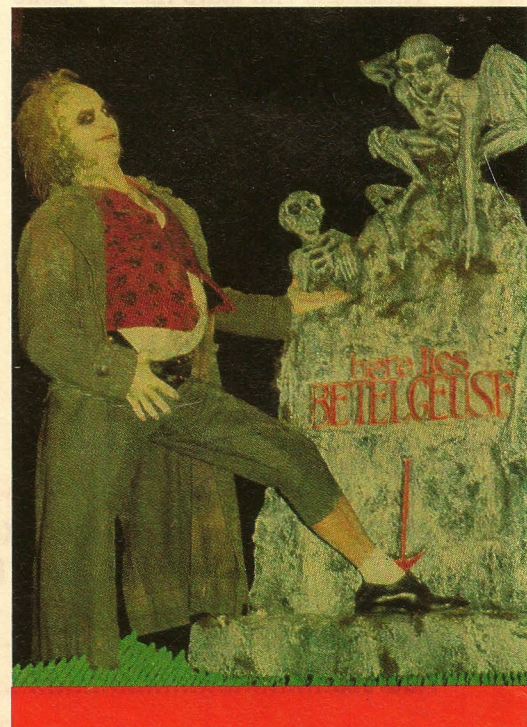


HAVING THE TIME OF HIS **DEATH!**

And Michael Keaton's going from Beetlejuice to Batman

• LEFT: Some of the oddball assortment you'll meet in Beetlejuice. From left, Winona Ryder plays Lydia, Jeffrey Jones is Charles, Catherine O'Hara plays Delia and Glenn Shadix is Otho. RIGHT: Michael Keaton as Beetlejuice, the ghost with the most.



MICHAEL KEATON, who shot to stardom in the films *Night Shift*, with Henry Winkler, and *Mr Mom*, with Teri Garr, has signed to play the lead role in the long-awaited film version of *Batman*.

Although the project, set to begin production in London soon, has been kept under wraps, Michael confirms he has signed for the lead. Also appearing in the film, for a reported fee of \$5 million, will be Jack Nicholson, playing *The Joker*.

Other stars have been approached for roles, including Elton John, who was asked to play villain Tom Thumb and has not made a decision, but details of the script have remained top-secret.

"The script is being finalised now

so I'm still not sure how I will play the character," Michael says.

"I barely remember watching *Batman* as a kid and I wasn't an avid fan, so I'm not concerned about bringing the persona of Michael Keaton to the *Batman* role. I think a little bit of me goes into every character I play.

"But I've definitely got ideas on what I want to do with *Batman* and so does director Tim Burton, so we'll just have to wait and see."

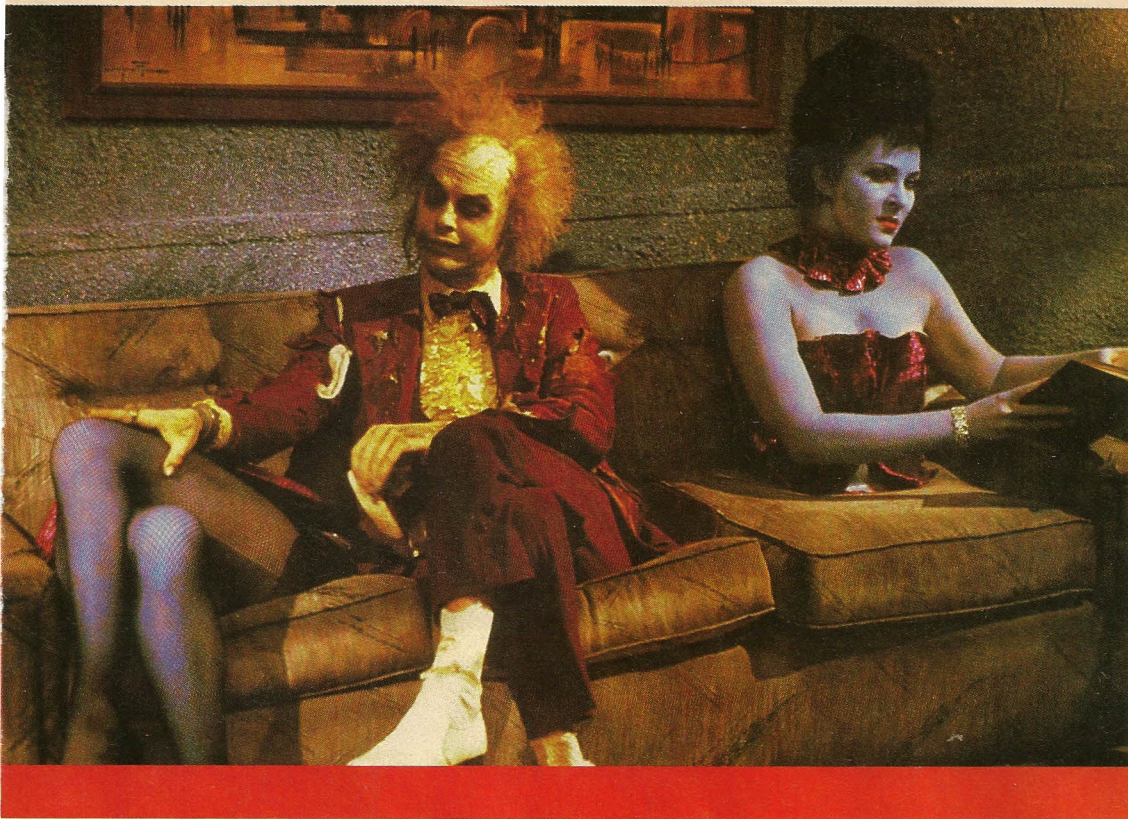
Burton directed Michael in his current movie *Beetlejuice*. It has taken about \$80 million in the U.S. and opens in Australia this week.

Michael plays a bizarre after-life character called Beetlejuice.

The story starts with a very ordinary couple, played by Alec

Baldwin and Geena Davis, who die in a freak accident and become ghosts in their New England home.

The couple are horrified by the vulgar New York family who move into the house and start tearing the rustic building apart. Unable to



6 I've worked in Las Vegas as a stand-up comedian, so I'm familiar with death! 9

ABOVE: All in the name of laughter from the hereafter . . . Beetlejuice meets a former magician's assistant, who's only half the woman she used to be!

scare off the newcomers, the ghosts turn to their "case worker", played by Sylvia Sidney, for help.

To see her on the Other Side, they have to sit in a waiting room filled with other recent corpses — including the two parts of a magician's assistant who was sawn in half, a hunter with a shrunken head and a diver with his leg still down the throat of a shark!

When Sidney's advice doesn't work, the couple call upon Beetlejuice to perform the reverse exorcism of the living from their home. Enter Michael Keaton, 35, complete with rotting teeth and wild, yellow hair, to steal the movie.

When the couple first meet him his head suddenly starts spinning round on his shoulders and when it stops he deadpans: "Don't you hate it when that happens?"

To prepare for his gruesome look as Beetlejuice, Michael spent three hours in the makeup chair each morning and one hour having the makeup removed.

"Sitting around all that time really ate into my energy level," he admits. "In that respect it was very draining, emotionally and physically — luckily I was filming for only a month."

The comic streak in Michael quickly becomes apparent in real

life, making it easy to see why casting people find him the ideal, funny leading man.

Talking about the after-life in Beetlejuice brought an obvious next question: What does Michael think about death?

"I'm all for it," he says, with a cheeky grin, before adding: "I'm probably as frightened as the next guy unless the next guy happens to be a kamikaze pilot!"

"But seriously," he adds with a smile that indicated he's being anything but serious, "I have a feeling it is going to be extremely relaxing. I think the worst will be the initial going into it — once I'm there, I'll be fine."

"I've worked in Las Vegas as a stand-up comedian, so I'm familiar with death!"

Michael says he enjoys working with director Tim Burton — "off-beat wouldn't even begin to describe what Tim likes, not to mention the fact he's just plain funny."

"He's a kooky kind of guy," Michael adds, "and we just keep tickling each other coming up with funnier things for the character to say. How can you say 'Your character wouldn't say that?' — This guy can say or do

RIGHT: Geena Davis (who plays Barbara) and friend in the waiting room . . . advice needed from the Other Side.

anything because he's dead!"

Michael has just completed work on a different type of project — playing an alcoholic in a dramatic movie, *Clean And Sober*.

"Beetlejuice was just insanity, showing up on the set and having a lot of laughs. It was external, working from the outside in."

"In *Clean And Sober* you work from the inside out. You find out who the character is from the inside and there's no halfway to do that."

"I had to go to lots of AA meetings and study addictions of every kind — because they say that everyone has an addiction — and I'd wind up emotionally drained at the end of the day."

From Jenny Cooney in Los Angeles

